



The Discursive Effects of a 'Pioneering Approach': Police Interviews with Rape Victims post-Operation Bluestone.

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Operation
BLUESTONE



Operation Bluestone began as Avon & Somerset Constabulary's new 'transformative' approach to investigating sexual offences. It has since evolved into Operation Soteria Bluestone with four new forces on board – The Metropolitan Police Service, Durham Police, West Midlands Police and South Wales Police, with the aim of building a new national operating model for the investigation of rape and serious sexual assault.

One strategic change is a shift to 'focus on offender behaviour rather than victim credibility'. Previous work (MacLeod 2010) identified a number of problems in relation to this issue in the talk of police interviewers (IRs) in their interactions with interviewees (IEs) reporting rape.

Extract 5-11: 'Angela', p.2

88 IE: •shih (3) he bought me two drinks sat at the table
(1) two big bottles of cider it was (3) u::m (2)
•shih they were passing (.) e:rm cocaine between (.)
him and Gary (.5) quite frequently going to the
toilets with this small bag, (.) •shih (10) •shih

179 IR: alright you'd said that they'd e:rm had this: (.) bag
of coke that they'd passed between them had you: taken
anything?

In extract 5-11 for example, the IR explicitly follows up the IE's description of the suspect's behaviour with a question about the IE's. Note also the relexicalization of the formal 'cocaine' to colloquial 'coke', a label which arguably implies a higher level of familiarity with the substance. This seemingly inconsequential change could have serious ramifications for the victim's credibility.

Extract 6-20: 'Angela', p.6

296 IR: (3) and then what happened?

IE: (.) they said "ah s- can we come back to your house"
(.) and I said "ok fine it's not very often I get
300 company" (.) didn't have a problem with it.

IR: (5) so how had you felt about the night so far with=

IE: =okay (.) no problems at all.

305 IR: (3) and you'd said yes because you were w- w-
enjoying the c[ompany,]

In 6-20 too, the IE's focus on the suspect is diverted to her own actions and, crucially, justification for them: the implication of the IR's turn at lines 306-307 is that the permitting the men to accompany her home is behaviour that requires an explanation. Aside from that, fairly substantial changes are made to her account from that she 'didn't have a problem with it' to 'enjoying the company'.

As with the drug-use implied in the previous extract, in the context of a rape accusation there may be, at a subsequent trial, an ideologically-facilitated tendency to challenge the veracity of her claims on the basis of her 'enjoying the company' of the suspect.

The current project aims to investigate the ways in which the Bluestone initiative is enacted through interviewers' linguistic behaviour in their interactions with rape victims. Have things changed for victims and their stories in the interview room? If so, how? And how can linguistics best feed in to specialised interviewer training?

